

### **Nevada County FIRST Defensible Space Education & Compliance Program**

Throughout Nevada County, many residents/private homeowners have begun the process of reducing the hazardous fire fuel loading around their private holdings in an attempt to protect their property, landscape, and the watershed from catastrophic wildfire. Nevada County is rated high in the Cal-Fire Watershed Assets at Risk FRAP Project. Nevada County is rich with watercourses and is home to one wild and scenic river, has high potential for erosion after a fire, has Pacific Gas and Electric hydroelectric plants, and is host to various riparian areas with endangered species and recreational water areas. Nevada County's development has taken place in the wildland urban interface which has the potential to adversely affect the watersheds in the event of wildfire. These issues are intertwined as one affects the other when, after a disastrous wildfire incident, the associated watershed and water supply system can be adversely affected by soil runoff, erosion, and vegetative debris accumulation. In addition, if structures are consumed by the wildfire, household and other toxic chemicals can be introduced into the watershed.

Historically speaking, settlers within the Sierra Nevada Region located their towns adjacent to some sort of water source which provided a vital resource for the future of the community. Water developments such as lakes, streams, ponds, and rivers were paramount for the survival of the community. In addition to towns most transportation routes and systems were also located adjacent or within proximity to rivers and other water sources.

Through an educational effort a pre-plan or an appraisal system of the local residential environment, a community can take advantage of prioritizing private residents and associated outbuildings which if not brought into compliance, will cause fires to become devastating thus effecting watershed values, natural resource economics, historical/cultural sites, recreational developments and human values at risk by inspecting and documenting certain priorities that will provide protection to both the human as well as the cultural, watershed and natural environment.

The program consists of a team of trained, qualified, defensible space advisors who conduct one-on-one home consultations with residents. The educational visit mirrors a PRC 4291 compliance inspection, but offers advice and solutions on how to effectively create defensible space on the individual's property. Each home setting is unique and often in mountainous areas 100 feet is not adequate to protect a structure from an approaching wildfire. Our advisors provide education on vegetation types, wildfire behavior, construction materials and techniques, evacuation planning, the burn permit process and cost-share programs that may assist landowners in reaching their goals. The program was implemented in 2007 and has been successful in creating neighborhood projects to clear hazardous fuels. The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County offers a free chipping program and Special Needs Assistance Program, which provides free clearing to qualified low-income seniors and physically disabled persons. Adding an additional compliance officer through the Nevada County Fire Marshal's office will provide a mechanism to enforce the law and not allow residents to become complacent to the growing fuel load condition around them.

According to the Fire Prevention Officer for the Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit of Cal Fire, during 2006 only 8,000 total compliance inspections were completed for the three counties. These compliance inspections resulted in only eight citations being issued. Statistics show that education combined with compliance yields greater results than

education alone. This program will provide for an estimated 4,500 education/compliance inspections in Nevada County, which will result in greater protection for the watersheds by avoiding catastrophic wildfire and enabling firefighters to quickly and safely contain wildfire events.

The cost of the program is \$62,700. Volunteer advisors and Cal Fire trainers will provide an in-kind cost share of \$5,400. The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County will provide a cash match of \$7,800 for volunteer mileage, awards and appreciation and program supplies. The total grant funds requested are \$49,500 for a one-year compliance officer, volunteer appreciation, program supplies and program coordination and administration.